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AUTHOR Macdonald, Maritza B.; Snyder, Jon
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ABSTRACT

Findings of a case study that examined professional accountability in an elementary classroom are presented in this paper. Classroom observation, document analysis, and postobservation conferences were used to examine the practices and beliefs of one female teacher of second and third graders at a multicultural public elementary school in New York City during the spring of 1991. The first section describes the explicit classroom interactions between the students and teacher, with a focus on the accountability process. The second section discusses the teacher's own cognitive frames regarding her practice and organizes them in light of issues of accountability and pedagogical decisions. Findings suggest that the teacher's essential cognitive frame reflects a "learner orientation," which implies that her special knowledge of each student and her knowledge of the classroom community are at the center of her pedagogical decisions. The teacher exhibited four dimensions of professional accountability: a defined professional role; a sense of community and understanding of diversity; work grounded in children's experiences; and use of multiple accountability mechanisms. (Contains 24 references.) (LMI)

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PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN A LEARNING-CENTERED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Maritza B. Macdonald and Jon Snyder

During the last several years, NCREST has engaged in a series of studies aimed at developing cases that document governance, curriculum and teaching, community, professional development, and accountability in learning-centered schools. This paper addresses professional accountability in one classroom in one such school. Professional accountability for teachers implies the standards of practice teachers demonstrate in their school lives through their knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and the processes teachers develop for holding themselves accountable to these standards. This case documents one classroom in a multicultural public elementary school in New York City in the spring of 1991.

The study describes the work of a teacher of second and third graders during the last three months of school. It represents a specific slice of time during the academic year -- the final hour: the time of reckoning, of ending projects, and of reporting to families. It is also a slice of the teacher's practice that describes her behaviors, values, and choices at a particular time and place.

The paper is organized in two sections. Following a description of the methodology, the first section introduces the school and presents a picture of a day in Sue's classroom. It describes the work of one classroom: the explicit interactions between children and adults, with special attention given to accountability processes. The second section discusses the teacher's own cognitive frames for her practice and organizes them in light of issues of accountability and pedagogical decisions. The findings suggest that Sue's essential cognitive frame reflects a "learner orientation." Such an orientation implies that Sue's special knowledge of each student and her knowledge of the classroom community are at the center of her pedagogical decisions. This orientation influences what, how, and why she teaches; what documentation she uses to record her students' learning; and what professional and curricular support she needs for her own work and development as a teacher.

Methodology

The case study is based upon analysis of data gathered from observations of classroom events: classroom and school documents; collections of student work; the teacher's analysis, recording, and reporting of student work; and the teacher's reflections on and assessments of her own teaching. Following

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each classroom observation, the researcher shared her notes with Sue, who then provided her "take" on what had occurred that day -- adding details to present a sharper picture of the practices as well as insights into what she was thinking and why she did what had been documented. The teacher-researcher collaboration was particularly important to the study. The content of this paper was shaped equally by the teacher and the writers/ observers.

Accountability issues came into sharp focus as a result of the collaborative analysis of the data. The data provided an example of specific instances of a teacher's practice with "detailed descriptions of how an instructional event occurred, complete with particulars of contexts, thoughts, and feelings" (Shulman, 1986). The dilemma in this kind of research is how to elicit teacher decisions and judgments that guide explicit behaviors. The post-observation conferences described above were also influenced by perspectives from pedagogical reasoning (Wilson, Shulman, and Richert, 1987), which provided entry points for probing the nature of the instruction, the adaptations made to respond to learners' needs, and the processes for evaluation and reflection that are fundamental to issues of accountability. This structure, combined with the use of student work to stimulate our conversations, provided us with techniques to "hear" Sue.

One key element of professional accountability is practices that are client-oriented (Benveniste, 1986; Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 1991). Client, in this case, refers to children and their families. Accountability includes, among much else, the systems used for documenting, assessing, and informing children and families of the on-going learning process and the children's social and academic performance. Another key element of professional accountability is an organizational structure that supports a teacher's ability to be responsible to her or his clients. There needs to be a strong continuity between the teachers' accountability mechanisms and those of the school at large.

The selection of the teacher for this case study was happenstance. Another teacher had been scheduled for observations but, due to schedule changes, was unavailable. Sue said it is "fine with me if you want to come to my class, but it might be boring because we'll be talking about tests." The initial discussion of tests that took place in the first observation later became the starting point from which we moved forward and backward in time to understand Sue's and the school's accountability mechanisms.

A Day In Sue's Class: April, 1991
The Final Hour

Spring fills the air during the last week in April. On Fordham Road in the Bronx, children walk briskly to school, jackets tied around their waists or draped over their shoulders. Some are riding subways and buses to school. The school is located in a district reflecting the widespread "savage inequalities" described by Kozol (1991). There is a vast diversity in economic resources, cultural groups, races, and religions within the community. Diverse languages appear on the many multilingual billboards and signs. The result is a complex mix of material wealth and poverty, but also a vibrant sample of the human race, portrayed in the children heading for school on this spring morning.

This is the time of year when standardized tests control life in schools. One cannot help but wonder how much these children's lives are really influenced by schooling, or how much of what they bring with them is validated or included in their school experiences? In many of the classrooms throughout the Bronx, teachers wait for the children, counting thin white booklets and sharpening pencils. They plan to spend most of the next five school days preparing for the citywide reading test to be given next week. The results will be published, teachers' evaluations will be affected, and superintendents will account for their year-long efforts in a chart published in the local paper.

The Bronx New School, a small alternative public school housed in the basement of a church, is located just off Fordham Road. The director of the school is near the gate, waiting to meet the three buses which bring children from several areas of the district. They climb off the buses, alert and lively, and enter the small school, a school striving to deal with the inequalities that surround it.

In one classroom in this school, a group of fourth and fifth graders makes preparations to spend the day at the Brooklyn Bridge, guided by their teacher, a visiting architecture professor, and his students from a local college. The trip leaders make sure that everyone has lunch, warm jackets, pencils, maps, and pads for note-taking. The group also has a meeting before leaving to discuss some architectural information they will be investigating and to review the safety rules for the trip.

Near the water fountain, several second and third graders talk about the mummies they saw on their recent visit to the Metropolitan Museum. In the other fourth and fifth grade, there is a map of a recent class trip to Van Cortlandt Lake. A group

of children examines the water in the terrarium and checks the "pond critters" they are keeping alive as part of their study of ecosystems. So the day begins at this public school.

Sue, the teacher of one of the two second/third grade classes, waits for her children. Upon entering, one feels welcome in the small but cozy room. It is filled with materials, books made by the children as well as resource books. There are also charts, graphs, bridges, and pyramids created by the children in a variety of materials. The daily schedule, located near the door, shows a pattern of long work periods in the morning and afternoon, integrated subject areas, and specific periods for reading and writing.

Morning Meeting	Lunch
Writing	Quiet Reading/Conferences
Gym/Story (Alt. days)	Story
Snack	Work Period (Math/Soc.St./Sci)
Work Period (Math/Soc. St./Sci.)	Clean-up
	Dismissal

The children are sitting on the carpeted area near the door. They have just finished their morning meeting, where they discussed the termination of their two major studies before the end of the year: the Egyptian study and all the projects related to it; and the science projects on human and animal habitats. Sue explains that next week they will be taking the citywide tests, and that today they will be using the next 25 minutes to become familiar with this type of test. "It is good to know what they look like, and the way in which the tests ask questions," she says. She holds up one of the thin white booklets, ***Total Reading -- Learning and Practicing,*** and explains that while they practice she wants them to remember three things:

> First, we will use this review book, which looks like the test. It gives you examples of the types of questions that come in these tests. It is a good idea to look at all the answers and really think about the one that makes more sense. Making sense is very important, so always ask yourselves, "Does this make sense?" And, if it does, then choose that answer.
>
> Second, it is very important that you understand that this test is only one day in your whole year, and that

you have been doing a lot of work, a lot of reading of interesting books, and a lot of writing and drawing about your trips and projects.

And the last thing I want you to know is that reviewing for this test is different from how we regularly work in our class. You won't be able to work together or help each other or use the books and charts from around the room. Today, think and answer by yourselves.

In these statements, Sue highlights certain values and norms about her teaching practice: (1) making sense is important; (2) cooperative work is a norm; and (3) more than one event is used to evaluate the work of children, and this evaluation is an ongoing process. These statements mirror the attitudes of the director of the school, as evidenced in the following excerpts from the school newsletter to families, dated April 15, 1991.

From the Director to the Families:

The Tests:

Thanks to the pressure from the professional and research community, the reading tests for second graders have been modified this year. They no longer test sub-skills such as phonics, syllabication, blends, etc. They are now like the tests for older children -- relatively short passages with words left out. They continue to use fairly short and generally pointless passages followed by trick questions and answers. They continue to do this even though evidence points to the fact that real reading can only occur in meaningful contexts.

At the Bronx New School, learning throughout the year is guided by our understanding of child development, not the requirements of the test. This stays firm as the basic philosophy of the school. An attempt is made to keep a casual and calm attitude toward the tests. They are a fact of life that children must experience in New York City public schools. The way in which we measure your child's growth and development is from such authentic assessment measures as teachers' anecdotal records, checklists of reading and behaviors, running records of children's actual reading performance, portfolios of children's writing, drawing, and mathematical problem solving.

In the classroom, Sue sits by the meeting area, where she assists each second grader in reading the instructions and matching the section with the answers. The third graders work by themselves at the tables around the room. Every once in a while a child says, "Sue, this doesn't make any sense," or "Does this make sense?" Other times, a child approaches a friend and then remembers Sue's directions to work alone. For 25 minutes, the children review the test material with Sue or by themselves, and

then the day proceeds without any further talk of tests.

After the test review period, children move freely around the room, looking for their work partners, for art materials, and for tools such as hammers and staplers. Some work alone, others seek companionship or help from one of three adults in the room: Sue, a male student teacher from a local college, and the researcher. During the work period, the focus is on the culminating events of a study of Egypt. Observing the room while the children work on their projects, one sees many charts, graphs, maps, and lists where children report what they know, and want to know, about particular subjects. All of these make evident the prevailing norms of this classroom:

- Cooperative work
- Making sense
- Organizing information
- Defining ideas
- Building a body of knowledge

There are bins with labels indicating their contents. Considerable creative logic is evident in the organization of so many things in such a small space. Even someone unfamiliar with the room can look at the pictures and labels and find items needed to work independently. There are baskets for homework, and baskets for math, writing, and art work. Many of the ideas expressed in the charts relate to science or to social studies. The environment is rich with ideas. There are all types of books -- from picture books to adult books and stories. There are resource books at many different reading levels: adult books about Egyptian history and about past and current life in Egypt; books about mythology; and books about gold jewelry and pyramids in different areas of the world.

There is an air of authenticity about the ideas recorded from the children and the selection of materials in the room. The language used in the charts and graphs is the children's own, recorded by their teacher, not generated from packaged curriculum materials. The following are samples of charts placed around the room:

What Shall We Study Next?

Space	Animals (the inside part of their bodies)
Human Body	Volcanoes
Mountains	Planes
Bridges	Insects
Crystals and Rocks	Dinosaurs (how they were discovered)

What Do We Know About Air?

February 5, 1991

Air	**helps us breathe**
	helps birds fly
	keeps planes up
	gives us oxygen

Class Rules

1. Share Materials.
2. Cleanup after yourselves.
3. Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
4. When someone is talking: Listen!

On another wall there is an enlarged copy of the New York subway map, well marked with stops from past field trips and other places of interest in the city, indicating advanced mapping skills. The tables are clustered to accommodate three or four children at a time. Students work on a variety of projects both collaboratively and independently. Two girls are discussing the length of the Nile and making labels for the Lower and Upper Nile. Three others are gluing and supporting a paper pyramid until it dries. There is a constant borrowing of paints, markers, glue, and scissors. Other children are writing stories or facts about what they have learned. Some are looking up the exact length of the Nile River to design an accurate key for their map. Adults and children work together, and all are clearly engaged in their tasks. The work time is long, busy, creative, but definitely not silent or directed solely by adults.

The researcher is filling pages with notes and a child asks about them. The researcher responds that her job is to record what she observes happening in classrooms so other people can learn how to create new schools. With an air of wisdom and authority, the child says it would be hard to have "so many people coming to visit schools," and returns to making the legend for her map.

At lunch, the teachers join a staff developer who meets regularly with them to talk about the children and review and discuss the development of curriculum. The staff developer suggests that during these meetings they also make plans to document and assess student work as well as to prepare for meetings with parents.

On this particular day, the children's lunch period is supervised by the paraprofessionals who live in this community and who work as aides in the classrooms with younger children. The paraprofessionals also attend individual or staff development sessions with the school psychologist. He believes that their observations and recommendations are important to understanding the lives of the children outside of school because they know the community so well. The paraprofessionals have hade particularly valuable contributions in guidance and home-school issues. Their recommendations have led to such outcomes as meetings with parents whose children were having difficulty attending school; staff discussions about setting limits for the older children; and finding community resources to deal with health, employment, schooling, and housing problems directly affecting the lives of the children.

After lunch, teachers return to their rooms to wait for children to come in from recess. Sue checks a list of individual readings. She collects the children's work from the homework basket and places it in folders containing other samples of their work. Also in the homework basket are teacher-made assignments. One recent math assignment contains these problems dictated by the children:

N's Problem:	**6 people are waiting for the bus. How many arms and legs do they have in all?**
D's Problem:	**There are 5 refrigerators with two sodas in each one. How many sodas in all?**

Another assignment is to complete a calendar for the month including all the school-related events, such as trips, project days, and birthdays. This assignment requires interaction with other people and is one example of what Sue means by work that "makes sense."

On another shelf sit stories and reports written by the children. One of the titles is "Two Girls and the Blob." Sue picks it up, smiles, and comments on the length and content of the paragraphs in this child's most recent stories.

Sue and the entire school work hard to communicate with families. Families receive the following documents and materials throughout the school year:

- Letters from the teacher providing ongoing detail about classroom work.

- Notices and newsletters written by the school director about general school events, community issues, and educational issues such as homework, tests, research, and ways of assessing student work.

- Portfolios of their children's work in different subject areas.

- Mid-year and spring progress reports (narrative and numerical).

- Homework samples.

- Standardized test results.

The following are samples of letters from around the time of this study showing the school-home communication about the curriculum and the upcoming tests.

Sample Letters from the End of the Year

April 24, 1991

Dear Families:

We had a wonderful trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Egyptian Collection yesterday. I was amazed by the wealth of information the children have already accumulated and their ability to make all kinds of connections to the new objects they were seeing. Their attentiveness and excellent behavior were specially noteworthy! I am sending home a family admissions pass that will enable you and your family to visit the museum free of charge at your convenience. It would be well-worth a visit. Next week we will be returning to the museum for a second look at the Egyptian Collection (it is huge), on May 2nd.

Today we watched a National Geographic video that gave the children a view of the Pyramids and the landscape of Egypt (and thus, the culture in context). Many of the children are also involved in making buildings out of cardboard and are involved in intense problem solving (i.e., how do I make this wall stand up or keep the roof from caving in?).

Intensive writing continues, as does our work in math involving multiplication and division concepts. We are also beginning to prep for the reading test.

Sue

May 3, 1991

Dear Families:

Our study of ancient Egypt continued to flourish this week. The children have been involved in making pyramids out of Legos, clay, and oak tag paper; drawing maps of Egypt on paper, and creating 3-D topographical maps out of papier-mache. As a class we put together a large information chart that pulled together the knowledge of ancient Egyptian culture that the children have acquired through their reading, class discussions, museum visits, and National Geographic videos.

Many of the children are also presenting independent building projects out of wood and cardboard, ongoing stories, and computer math games. We have also been busy with reading test preps.

Have a good weekend,

Sue

May 30, 1991

Dear Families:

As another year draws to a close, our class would like to invite you into our classroom for "Book and Project Day" on Wednesday, June 12th, at 1:30 pm.

Your children will have the opportunity to share their written and three-dimensional work at this time. Refreshments will be served. Please dress coolly because it can get very warm in our little room!

I will appreciate your filling out the form below and returning it so that we have some idea of how many guests to plan for.

Thanks,

Sue

Sue continues her preparations before the children return from recess. She saves some of the children's work in folders, writes instructions for the afternoon work, and sets up materials at each of the tables. One of the children arrives from recess earlier than the rest of the group and informs Sue that there was an argument on the playground. Sue reassures him that they will have a meeting to discuss the problem and find a solution. The child seems reassured and waits for the rest of his class to return.

When the others arrive, they appear upset. Sue speaks briefly with the adult who has been with the group, then asks the children to get a drink of water, if they need one, and to join her in the meeting area. The student teacher also joins them. Sue starts the meeting by asking what happened, and what they think needs to be done when there is an argument between two people. Some children raise their hands and others speak up right away. They ignore the first question and Sue listens to their responses to the second. Some say, "They should work it out." Others argue, "You shouldn't get involved." Sue calmly asks, "Why?" By their involvement in responding and finding solutions, it seems they are used to solving conflicts as a group.

One child explains that "when too many people are involved, then you start blaming." Another states, "It is hard to say who is right if your friend is involved in the argument." A third student expands on the idea of the loyalty of friends. She gives examples of how even grownups have a hard time when there is an argument that involves a friend. More examples are given about similar situations at home and at school. Sue listens to them

attentively. She discusses solutions in a way that does not focus on the particulars of the children's argument in the playground, but rather on the nature and consequences of conflicts common to the entire group.

They finish the discussion by agreeing not to turn little problems into big problems. Sue stresses that, in the future, they should first try to solve the arguments among themselves. If they cannot, Sue reassures them that she and the other adults in the school are there to help them.

The day ends with individual reading. All the children locate their books and begin reading. Many of the selections relate to some aspect of natural science or to people and the way they live. As Sue reads with the children individually, she takes notes. During the last ten minutes, she reads the class a chapter from a story she has been reading with them for the last week.

After the children leave, there are still jobs to do. Sue notes the progress that has been made on the different projects they worked on this afternoon, talks to the student teacher about the children he was helping during work time, and collects the test review books, commenting to herself how some of these text examples make no sense to her students. She writes notes documenting the problems of particular children, describing the areas in which they experience difficulty.

During this time, Sue shows the researcher review books she has made with the children at the end of a curriculum study. They include work samples and written commentaries from all of the children, showing what projects they have worked on and what they have learned. One of the books, ***Making Our Family Homes***, begins with, "First we made room maps. We pretended we were bugs on the ceiling looking down on our rooms." On other pages there are maps of "How to get to school from our homes," and an explanation of how "we brought shoe boxes into school to make our own model homes."

A Taste of Home: Family Recipes from Sue's Class is the title of another curriculum review book. This book includes a picture of each child with members of her/his family, a brief narrative about each family, and a favorite family recipe. The narratives, as exemplified by the following four, show the diversity of the class:

> **My Family:** Picture number one is my mom, dad, and me. Picture number three is my brother and sister. What is important to me is that they love you a lot, and also we are all from Nigeria and now we live in New York City. [Her recipe is for Chin-Chins.]

The Pictures: The picture I am going to bring today is about my family. My family comes from Taiwan. Now we live at New York. [Her recipe is for Shrimp Chow Mein.]

My Family: Both my mom and dad were born in New York. Mom was born on Governor's Island in an Army Hospital. [His recipe is for Chocolate Fudge Brownies.]

My Sister's Birthday Party: This is in my grandmother's house in the Dominican Republic. It is my sister's birthday. [His recipe is for Arroz con Gandules.]

City Lights: Experimenting with Electricity and Building a City, by Sue's Class (Bronx New School, Fall, 1990), opens as follows:

Starting June of last year we were interested in electricity. What could you do with a battery, bulb, and wire? We decided to find out!
How many ways could we find to make a bulb light up?
How many ways would it not?
We drew diagrams of our discoveries.

Later, in one of our focused conversations, Sue used these books to stimulate her recall of curriculum decisions and to analyze, in more detail, the value of her homework, the different levels and ways of expressing knowledge, and the nature of the projects and experiments that occurred during the year. These books are authentic examples of the three values expressed earlier in the day: making sense; working cooperatively; and using multiple ways to demonstrate one's knowledge.

Discussion

This section summarizes the findings, draws preliminary conclusions about studying accountability in elementary schools, and explores possible future directions for such work. Four dimensions of professional accountability summarize what Sue expected of herself, her colleagues, and her school. The four encapsulate the nature of our findings:

1. A teacher and a school with a defined professional role.

2. A teacher and a school with a sense of community that includes an understanding of diversity in students, learning, and teaching.

3. A teacher and a school whose work is grounded in children's social and intellectual experiences.

4. A teacher and a school that use multiple accountability mechanisms, including continuous opportunities for teacher growth and support.

A Teacher and a School With a Defined Professional Role

To be successful at teaching, one must know who one is and what one is about. Sue was "about" transforming herself, transforming the conception of knowledge, and, most importantly, providing her students with the tools to transform themselves. In short, she was constructing a classroom community of learning. She held herself accountable to this task by designing and documenting her own and her students' work in ways that were responsive to the individuals and their contextual needs; by seriously sustaining the dialogue among herself, her students, and their families in meaningful ways; and by being knowledgeable about her students, their families, herself, the subject matter, and pedagogy.

A day in Sue's classroom showed many examples of these commitments. Speaking about children's achievement and her relationship to it, Sue explained:

I feel very strongly that I am the teacher. That is my main role. I am not a friend. I feel the same way towards parents. It is lovely if I become friends with them, but my primary role is as their child's teacher. And, therefore, their child is going to learn in my classroom.

She reflected often on the difficulty of fulfilling her sense of being a teacher:

> A teacher has to work very hard to make sure that everyone is included, that there is no such thing as an outsider; everyone is an insider. If someone is an outsider, I need to work with the whole group to move all children into the inner circle. Eventually, they learn to do that for each other, sort of self-regulating.

Her description of her work with one child illustrates how she put all of her commitments together by building on the strengths of each individual within the social context of the classroom:

> First I met with the mom, then he [the student] joined us. We discussed it together. She needed to know that I was going to help her child but that we both needed to work together. We also worked really hard to help him become part of the group. He needed to know that we would help him but that there were limits he could not cross. "You cannot attack other children or go off into your own world." By the end of the second year, this child could stand in front of the room and share his work. This is why I am such a proponent of mainstreaming. You cannot put kids who are crazy in a setting where everyone is crazy or they stay crazy! And instead of reinforcing that negative view, I try to look for the talents too -- this child happens to be the most incredible artist I have ever seen. I am an artist as well, that is my training pre-teaching. So there is where we really hooked in personally, and then we built on that.

A Sense of Community

The classroom and the school, as a community of learners, were at the center of Sue's life as a teacher. Collaboration, collegiality, and community building describe Sue's and the school's values and practices. These help prevent fragmentation while enhancing noncompetitive, communal, and client-centered problem solving (Sarason, 1971; Lieberman, 1988; Little, 1988; Lieberman and Miller, 1990). In practice, these values are enacted in the quality of interactions and dialogues that are maintained for mutual trust and respect.

Talking about her class, Sue emphasized the importance of community in the learning process and the role of the children in supporting this sense of community:

> It was a very strong group, and they really felt that they belonged to one another by the end of those two years. Even the kids who had come into the class late were really welcomed into the community.

Sue spoke often of the school traditions that helped foster a sense of community, such as the school sing, the Friday school meetings, and the numerous field trips.

> The entire school used to meet on Fridays, and we'd do this beautiful thing where a couple of kids from each class would share some project they were working on. It could be a story, a three-dimensional project -- it could be anything. Three girls brought their relief map!
>
> I feel that all the trips helped build class solidarity and community. By December, all the discipline problems began to fade as the kids hooked into it. Trips were probably the single most unifying experience for everyone.

Work Grounded in Children's Experiences

Grounding classroom work in a student's own social and intellectual experiences is based upon a social constructivist model of how children learn (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1966; Moll and Greenberg, 1990) that requires active involvement, connections between school and community, and inclusion of home knowledge in school work. It demands a rich and challenging curriculum grounded in cognitive theory, responsive to diverse populations of students, and providing opportunities to solve problems using critical thinking. In addition, it requires multiple ways of assigning, observing, documenting, and assessing student work.

One key ingredient is flexible assignments with perceptive observations of the choices students make. Discussing the beginning of the study of habitats, Sue shared a book the class had made: "I left the initial assignment open ended. The children did not have to just do a bedroom. They could draw any part they liked about where they lived. It was really interesting to see what they selected."

A second key ingredient is the ability to transform the observation-based understanding of children into authentic and intellectually rigorous learning experiences. For instance, when asked about the unit on Egypt, Sue replied:

> That got started during a work period. It was an extraordinary thing. One of the children started making pyramids of Legos. Then a couple of children started doing it too, and I was fascinated. When S. reported on what she had done during work period and pulled off the top of the pyramid and they saw it was hollow, everyone seemed hooked. I said to myself, "Let me get some books on Egypt and pyramids and see what happens."

At another point, she recalled how parents and community issues folded into the unit:

> I wrote to the parents explaining that we seemed to be embarking on a study of Egypt, so if they had anything at home that related, please send it in with the child. I do that all the time. So the books started to come in. A Jewish girl brought these books about Passover, and the kids started making the connections to the Jews as slaves of the Egyptians with work we had done when we spoke about African-American slavery here in this country, and Harriet Tubman and Moses, and they were making these incredible connections.

Sue's elaboration on field trips exemplifies the use of the community as a source for developing inquiry that includes children's social and cultural lives outside of the school:

> We took lots of nature walks. We counted everything and then gathered all that data and put it into graphs. I gave them maps. We used subway maps for two years. For every single trip I would blow up that section, and they marked exactly where we were going. A couple of kids were totally fixated on the New York City Transit System...
>
> I really like going back to the same places several times. I find that the kids' interests and focus deepens. We went back to the Botanical Garden three times.

Finally, assessment of student growth is an active ongoing process also grounded in the interests and strengths of students. In a reference to the writing process, Sue showed one student's work and explained:

> She worked on this book probably six or eight weeks, began this very involved story called "Kamar Lost In Egypt." And that child pulled together almost every single aspect we had studied about Egypt within her story.

One of the major challenges often posed to educators in learning-centered schools is: "It all sounds wonderful, but how do you integrate children's interests with the demands of external requirements and expectations?" Sue explained how she approached the task with this example:

> I really needed to go with his interest in fish because it seemed to run so deep, and he had not been so involved previously. I also needed to study how to make this interest appropriate for third grade level work. The new state science curriculum guide was the answer. I got lots of ideas for experiments on water pressure, temperature, sound waves, ocean zones, and other multisensory, science-focused work...
>
> I am informed of what is in the State Curriculum Guides. I don't use them to cover that curriculum, but to see how what I plan uncovers the curriculum. Through my science studies and trips and mapping, I found that all the math skills we used were part of the math curriculum. I know what is there and I find ways to uncover it.

Multiple Accountability Mechanisms (including continuous opportunities for teacher growth and support)

Sue and the Bronx New School used multiple accountability mechanisms to assure responsible and responsive practice -- in planning, teaching, evaluating, and reflecting. For instance, at the end of each unit of study, Sue and her class would collect all their thoughts and artifacts and distill this material into a book about the subject of the unit:

> What I do is document the whole process. I set up structures to review what they did and they write it up. I arrange photos in a logical way, and we do a lot of recall -- even from one year to the next. [Flipping through the pages of one such book and giving the researcher a guided tour] Here is Betty finishing her house and sewing her pillows. Brian is making people out of wood. I also posted all the room plans.

Accountability and learning to read are nearly synonymous in the primary grades. Sue believes that when children leave her class, they should be able to read for information. This skill, she believes, will open doors for them to learn about anything. Therefore, she does not use basal readers. She does, however, keep close track of her children's reading skills:

> It is sort of accountability. I make sure that silent reading is not just looking at pictures. I use miscue

analyses regularly. I know that some teachers hate it, but I need to know where a kid is at.

When discussing the roles of tests in her accountability scheme, Sue emphasized,

> It is my responsibility to help prepare children to deal with them. It alleviates worry. I also explain to parents that development is uneven and that a child may zoom ahead in math and not have the same results in reading. I also make sure I have many ways of documenting the different areas of learning so that I can explain to families what their children can do.

At the school level, staff meetings are an important forum for keeping the adults intellectually alive:

> We discussed curriculum all the time. The bulk of our staff meetings was never business. We'd go through that really quickly and we were very focused around literacy or math development, all curriculum. At one point, we developed a structure for a curriculum review following the Descriptive Review format from the Prospect School in Vermont... It was really a chance to assess not only what I had done, but where we had problems. What was mine, and what was more the children's agenda, and what I had done when they came into conflict. At one point, I really started reflecting on the children. Is a child who mostly observes less engaged than someone who is actually doing a project? How am I valuing the two situations?

The staff also kept updated on changes and advances in teaching, such as whole language, using the new framework from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as a model for collaborative staff development, implementing the state's new science framework, exploring educational opportunities at museums and technology centers, considering issues of second language learning, and tapping on children's previous knowledge. In addition, the staff developed their own standards and processes for evaluating themselves. In so doing, they were forced to come to a consensus and to articulate the essence of what they considered "good teaching," as well as to develop flexible indicators for these standards.

Conclusions and Further Directions

Sue's classroom provides a picture of the interdependency that exists between teacher knowledge of self, learners, context, curriculum, teaching, and assessment that is essential if a school is to be responsible for, and responsive to, the needs of

its clients. Such interactions and relationships, when elegantly enacted, are the components of professional accountability. Sue's classroom also highlights the relationship between continuous opportunities for professional growth and support and truly accountable practice.

Our work with Sue suggests that professional accountability can be further probed through three different types of research:

- Descriptive case studies of effective, experienced teachers whose work in constructing communities of learners can be used as a starting point for analysis. By probing into actual practices, the field may develop a deeper knowledge of the preparation and beliefs that inform successful construction of knowledge in learning-centered classrooms.

- Descriptions of complete school settings that reflect and support a systemic approach to professional accountability with a learning-centered focus. Such work could describe the goals, contexts, values, norms, structures, feedback mechanisms, incentives, and safeguards that foster accountability.

- Descriptive studies of teacher development (pre-service and inservice) and teacher evaluation policies and practices that increase the probability of the kinds of professionally accountable practices so well actualized in Sue's classroom in the Bronx New School.

In conclusion, perhaps the most significant aspect of this study is its portrayal of Sue's attempts to address issues of diversity that are essential for intellectually engaging education for students who have been traditionally underserved by more traditional systems of accountability. Sue's pedagogical decisions and her ways of uncovering and assessing knowledge are respectful and responsive to the varied needs of her multicultural classroom. They are also consonant with the standards proposed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1991) for making teaching responsive to issues of diversity:

> To respond effectively to individual differences, teachers must know many things about the particular students they teach: Alex has a stutter, Maria loves science fiction, Toby is anxious about mathematics, Marcus is captivated by jazz. But accomplished teachers know much more -- whom their students go home to at night, how they have previously performed in standardized tests, what sparks their interest. This kind of specific knowledge is not trivial, for teachers use it constantly to decide how best to tailor instruction. (p.17)

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